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SUBJECT: CODEL McCain Visit to Vietnam

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In their April 6-8 visit to Vietnam, CODEL McCain covered a wide range of issues with the Vietnamese leadership, including the recent DPRK missile test, the need for a new bilateral agreement on adoptions, the GVN's desire for market economy status and the need for greater respect for human rights and press freedom. The Codel, led by Senator John McCain and including Senators Lindsey Graham and Amy Klobuchar, held separate meetings in Hanoi with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Phu Trong. Senator McCain also spoke to an enthusiastic group of several hundred students at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, stressing the need to turn away from economic isolationism, increase military-to-military cooperation and improve human rights and political freedoms in Vietnam. The delegation's visit received extensive positive coverage in the local and national press. End summary.

#### VIETNAMESE LEADERS STRESS COOPERATION

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¶2. (SBU) PM Dung thanked Senator McCain for his long-standing role in strengthening bilateral cooperation. Dung noted that Vietnam had 6.3 percent economic growth in 2008 and said that growth in the first quarter of 2009 was 3.1 percent, acknowledging the United States role in spurring growth in Vietnam through trade and investment. He said trade volume had a ten-fold increase from 2001 through the end of 2008 and now totaled over \$15 billion annually. PM Dung highlighted bilateral cooperation in four main areas: trade and investment, education, climate change and security issues. In discussing trade, both Prime Minister Dung and National Assembly Chairman Trong urged the United States to move forward in recognizing Vietnam's status both as a market economy and making it a Generalized System of Preferences beneficiary.

¶3. (SBU) Turning to education, PM Dung commented that by increasing the number of Vietnamese studying in the United States we are building a "lasting bridge of cooperation." He noted that currently 10,000 Vietnamese students are in the United States. On climate change, PM Dung stressed that according to international if sea levels continue to rise the effect on Vietnam will be second only to that on Bangladesh. In response to a question from Sen. Graham on the need for increased nuclear power to combat climate change, PM Dung responded that the GVN is planning to construct a 4,000 MW reactor and is in the final stages of completing the bidding process. The PM also commented that without the new reactor Vietnam will be unable to meet its growing electricity demand.

¶4. (SBU) PM Dung also asked for U.S. assistance with Agent Orange remediation, locating Vietnam's 300,000 MIA and in dealing with unexploded ordnance and remnants of war. PM Dung thanked Senator McCain for the United States' large financial commitment to fight HIV/AIDS in Vietnam and for Cindy McCain's personal contributions to the country through her involvement with Operation Smile in Vietnam.

¶5. (SBU) Senator Klobuchar asked for assistance from the Prime Minister in rebuilding the bilateral adoption relationship. PM Dung

responded that the GVN continues to move towards joining the Hague Convention soon and that he had recently convened an inter-ministerial discussion on the Hague Convention. He stressed that he wants cooperation on adoptions to move forward and asked for assistance in getting a new adoption agreement signed.

¶16. (SBU) Sen. Klobuchar also raised the increased agricultural exports from the United States in both meetings with the Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Assembly. Chairman Trong responded that Vietnam too wants to increase agricultural exports to the United States, especially basa catfish. He stressed that Vietnam's basa catfish exports should not be singled out in the farm bill before Congress.

#### SECURITY ISSUES, NORTH KOREA AND IRAN

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¶17. (SBU) Rounding out the top areas for cooperation, Dung focused on continued cooperation on security issues such as counterterrorism and the fight against transnational crime. Senator McCain stressed the need for improved military-to-military cooperation within the realm of security issues with both PM Dung and NA Chairman Trong. Sen. Graham asked both the Prime Minister and the Chairman about their thoughts on North Korea's recent missile test. PM Dung answered that Vietnam wants peace and reunification in the Koreas and opposes weapons of mass destruction. He affirmed Vietnam's support for UNSC Resolution 1718 on DPRK and stressed that all countries should abide by the resolution. He also said that the Six-Party Talks remain the best mechanism to resolve the issue.

¶18. (SBU) National Assembly Chairman Trong likewise echoed PM Dung's calls for peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula and the

HANOI 00000336 002 OF 002

importance of the Six-Party Talks. He said that North Korea and Iran both must comply with international law and practices when asked by Sen. Graham the best path forward in dealing with the two countries. Trong counseled all parties to show restraint and use dialogue to solve ongoing disputes.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRESS FREEDOM

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¶19. (SBU) In his meetings with the Prime Minister and National Assembly Chairman, Sen. McCain asserted the need for a free press to combat corruption in a democratic society, and questioned Chairman Trong on the arrest and conviction of journalists who had uncovered the PMU-18 corruption scandal. Chairman Trong agreed that a free press was important. He asserted that the journalists in question were arrested not because they reported on corruption but due to violating the law and misstating the facts of the case. He noted that many NA committee hearings and all main sessions are now aired live on national television. He also stated that Vietnam currently has more than 40,000 professional journalists and several hundred news agencies.

¶10. (SBU) Noting the National Assembly's desire for stronger ties with the U.S. Congress, Chairman Trong asked the delegation to send his warm regards to Speaker Pelosi and let her know that he would like to extend an invitation for Speaker Pelosi to visit Vietnam.

#### SPEECH FOCUSES ON COOPERATION, LIBERALIZATION

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¶11. (SBU) Senator McCain's speech at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam drew hundreds of cheering students and faculty. Senator McCain dedicated a large portion of his speech to encouraging enhancing bilateral military-to-military cooperation by increasing IMET exchanges, adding additional ship visits, and continuing discussions about Vietnam's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. He also focused on the need for Vietnam to "take steps toward greater political liberalization" by "allowing greater freedom of expression, releasing all individuals imprisoned for peacefully expressing their views, improving human rights, and widening the scope of political activity."

PRESS COVERAGE POSITIVE AND EXTENSIVE

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¶12. (SBU) The delegation's visit received wall-to-wall positive press coverage, with all major national and local news daily carrying extensive articles. State-run Vietnam Television's nightly news program, watched by an estimated 25 million Vietnamese, spent nearly six minutes reporting on the delegation's meetings with Prime Minister Dung and National Assembly Chairman Trong.

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